

Natural Resources, Environment  
and Great Lakes Committee

October 17, 2012



National Wolfwatcher Coalition

<http://wolfwatcher.org>

Headquarters: 401 884 2808

Great Lakes Regional 906 988 2892

Dear Committee Members,

We are appalled. What is occurring in this committee is despicable and every member who partakes in this charade should be ashamed. After hearing Thursday night at the NRC meeting in Ontonagon, that Mr. Casperson planned to hear testimony 10/17 regarding the designation of the wolf as a “game” animal, numerous calls were made to Casperson’s office and the clerk of the committee in an attempt to learn more. Neither the aides nor the clerk knew anything of Mr. Casperson’s plans.

Then, late Monday, notification of this meeting was received and Tuesday morning, Lauren Michalak verified that **no** Senate bill had been introduced. She explained that the purpose of the Wednesday meeting is to take “informational” testimony in anticipation of a bill being introduced.

This past spring Senator Casperson gathered only supporters for SB996. He invited them to participate and provide testimony at a committee hearing, arranged for video conferencing two weeks prior to the meeting but then only informed the general public of the opportunity to comment at the last minute.

This committee hearing is clearly a deliberate attempt to once again squelch public comment on a controversial issue and mislead committee members into believing there is support for his proposal. Anticipating this may occur again, the National Wolfwatcher Coalition solicited comments and as of Tuesday, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1314 individuals expressed objection to HB 5834 by signing a petition sent to Michigan Representatives and Senators.

Due to the short notice, we are unable to give personal testimony and hereby submit the following testimony.

The National Wolfwatcher Coalition, Inc is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting positive attitudes about wolves through education. We are a nationwide organization, with over 250,000 supporters, representing not only Michigan residents but others who recreate in the state and purchase Michigan products. As our name implies, our supporters enjoy viewing wolves, finding their tracks and hearing their howls.

There is no emergency. Wolves were federally delisted only nine months ago. There is no scientific evidence or peer reviewed research that supports the need for designating the wolf a game animal or for establishing a recreational wolf hunting season.

Before considering any bill designating the wolf a game animal or any other wolf legislation that comes before you, we hope you will read the Wolf Management Plan. The approved plan strikes a balance between protecting the wolf and resolving conflicts. The plan strongly emphasizes the use of non-lethal controls, the valuable role of wolf education and the need for ongoing research. This plan is a model for other states not only because of its sound scientific management but also because it was developed in partnership with twenty agencies/organizations representing a diversity of interests including hunting, trapping, livestock producers, public safety, tourism, tribes and wolf education and protection groups. The Wolf Roundtable reached consensus on every issue except whether a regulated wolf hunting/trapping season should be provided specifically for recreational or utilitarian purposes.

Section 6.12.1, paragraph 2 of the plan states, "Some situations may warrant consideration of reducing wolf numbers in localized areas as a means to reduce the risk of negative interactions. Such consideration could be necessary if a high density of wolves in an area, rather than the behavior of individual wolves, was determined to be responsible for problems that could not otherwise be addressed through non-lethal or individually directed lethal methods. As of this writing, a situation of this type **has not occurred** in Michigan." (Emphasis added)

The Michigan DNR already has a variety of tools available to effectively manage wolf conflicts, making the recreational hunting of wolves unnecessary.

There are roughly 900 working farms in the U.P. Over the past 17 years there have been about 230 verified wolf depredation events. Approximately 7% of U.P. farms have experienced a verified wolf depredation. In 2010 (53%) and 2011 (43%) of the depredation was on a single farm. The best way to manage problem wolves when non-lethal measures fail is to insure producers follow best management practices and to target the wolves responsible for the depredation. Research shows that randomly killing wolves not responsible for depredation can actually cause depredation to increase.

Wolf-related conflicts are often caused by the behavior of a few individual wolves, and management at small scales can often address problems effectively. The wolf management plan allows for lethal control of wolves when non-lethal measures are ineffective. Further, livestock producers are compensated for verified losses caused by wolves and can be issued landowner permits to kill wolves. Livestock producers and dog owners can kill wolves, without a permit, that are in the act of attacking their livestock or dog.

There is also a federal grant to pay for non-lethal measures intended to reduce depredations. So far, approximately 20 donkeys have been placed on farms and fencing has been purchased for 7 farms. These and other non-lethal measures have proven to be effective in many situations.

DNR has exercised their authority to remove wolves that have become habituated to people. In April 2011, DNR destroyed three wolves. This past spring eight more wolves were killed in Ironwood. This control action was ordered by the MI DNR as a pro-active measure. The wolves were in a residential area, drawn there in part because of the recreational feeding of deer. The wolves did not threaten or harm any human.

With all the non-lethal and lethal measures available to control problem wolves, there is no scientific evidence to support the need (and little public support) for a recreational hunting season for wolves and no need to designate the wolf a game animal.

The results of a USDA Forest Service study released this year shows that individuals living in the U.S. are becoming increasingly more likely to observe or photograph nature than they are to fish, hunt, or participate in other traditional outdoor activities <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/40453>. The hunting community represents a small percentage of the general population. The Michigan DNR reported that all hunting license sales have been trending

downward for the last ten years. In 1992 1.1 million people purchased hunting licenses. That number has since dropped to about 780,000. Yet, wolf hunting legislation is being driven by special interests including the hunting community with little consideration of other organizations.

A small vocal minority support the recreational hunting of wolves. A 2011 survey conducted in the 15 Upper Peninsula counties and eight counties in the Northern Lower Peninsula (residents who live within wolf range or potential wolf range) showed strong support for wolves in Michigan. When hunters were asked if they would they purchase a hunting license if the wolf was designated a game species, 59% responded they would not.

We have been told by Mr. Huuki's aide that legislation is needed so that the wolf can be afforded protection. This is simply not true. In April 2009 the wolf was removed from the state list of endangered species and reclassified as a protected non-game species. Penalties for illegally killing a wolf are established by the State Legislature and penalties for wolf-related violations could be elevated regardless of whether wolves are designated as game or protected non-game animals.

Some have suggested that a wolf hunting season would garner much needed revenue for the State through the sale of hunting licenses. However, legislators should consider alternate funding sources. For example, the same 2011 survey revealed that 65% of respondents support the funding of wolf management and monitoring through the sale of a wildlife license plate and 53% support expanding types of sporting goods taxed to fund wildlife restoration.

The DNR acknowledges through the plan that the hunting of wolves is biologically complex. The effects of a hunting season and impacts on the wolf population must take into consideration many factors including population size, age and sex structure, immigration and emigration rates, birth rates, and natural and human-induced mortality rates.

The hunting of wolves is also a controversial issue because individuals have differing experiences, values and attitudes that shape their image of the wolf. It is therefore critical that decisions be based on sound scientific management not fear, myths or embellished stories.

Michigan has a sensible wolf management plan supported by 20 diverse organizations which has been in effect only nine months. We believe the DNR must evaluate the impact lethal control will have on pack dynamics and population growth prior to the designation of the wolf as a game animal.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Nancy Warren*

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Great Lakes Regional Director, National Wolfwatcher Coalition

PO Box 102, Ewen, MI 49925

906 988 2892

[nancy@wolfwatcher.org](mailto:nancy@wolfwatcher.org)